

Schools Forum

**Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 11th November, 2008 at 6.00 p.m.
at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall**

Present: Mr. A.F. Cheminais
Mr. J. Baker
Mr. S. Flynn
Ms. H. Lomas
Mrs. E. Stringer
Mrs. R. Poyser
Mr. A. Davies
Mr. G. Deakin
Mr. E. Gee
Mr. F. Hodgkinson
Mr. M. Sweeney
Mrs. M. Letts
Mrs. K. Delaney

In Attendance: Paul Smith (Human Resources, Walsall Council)
Lesley Jones (Walsall Council)
Mr. B. Fielding (Building Schools for the Future)
Julie Taylor (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
Ms. D. Morris (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
Mr. S. Read (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
Ms. A. Walton (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)

		Action
1(a) 11.11.08	Election of Chairman Mr. J. Baker.	Clerk to action

Mr. Baker in the Chair

1(b) 11.11.08	Election of Vice-Chairman Mr. A. Davies	Clerk to action
2. 11.11.08	Apologies Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on	

	behalf of Mr. S. Griffiths, Mrs. E. Maher, Mr. G. Crowther, Miss S.M. Bradford, Mr. J.P. Clarke, Mr. M. Barton and Mr. A. Bowater.	
11.11.08	<p>Julie Taylor</p> <p>Dawn Morris introduced Julie Taylor, the newly appointed Head of Service - Finance, Walsall Children's Services - Serco to the meeting.</p>	
3(a) 11.11.08	Minutes - 24th June, 2008	Approved as a correct record
3(b) 11.11.08	Minutes - 16th September, 2008	Approved as a correct record
4. 11.11.08	<p>Matters arising from the minutes</p> <p>16th September, 2008</p> <p>Review of Indicative Budget 2009/10</p> <p>Mrs. Poyser referred to the £450,000 shortfall in Walsall's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) resulting from six primary schools completing the PLASC census incorrectly.</p> <p>Dawn Morris explained the background to how this situation had occurred. She said that on investigation of the census data used to calculate our estimate of DSG, it appeared that six primary schools had failed to change the data used for recording children transferring from nursery to reception and had continued to record them as part time rather than full time.</p> <p>In regard to 2009 and 2010 financial years, pupil projections had been revisited in July 2008 to compare more recent data to pupil estimates undertaken in February 2008. The revised data, including offers for September 2008, suggested that pupil numbers were decreasing faster than previously envisaged. This was further exemplified, when considering the September census for secondary schools, numbers having reduced by another 100 since July 2008.</p>	

	<p>She said that as indicative DSG income is calculated by multiplying the Local Authority's guaranteed funding per pupil (GFU) by the projected number of pupils in Walsall's schools, the use of a reduced pupil number resulted in a reduction in our early estimates of DSG income for 2009 & 2010.</p> <p>Currently the potential loss of income over first estimates was approximately £2 million across the two financial years and while a Local Authority could carry forward a deficit across into the next multi year period, the level of deficit projected would seriously impact on the Local Authority's ability to fund schools for inflation and pay award increases in 2011.</p> <p>Following a meeting in August with council officers some savings in 2008 had been identified in central spending areas, which has reduced the potential shortfall at the end of 2008 to £300,000. It was hoped that by March 2009 further savings would reduce the shortfall.</p> <p>With regard to indicative budget figures, it had been agreed, at the last meeting of the Forum, to republish indicative budget figures using September census data, a process allowed by regulation provided the Local Authority gave 28 days' notice to governing bodies, which hopefully would result in limited further change between indicative and final budget figures produced in the Spring Term.</p> <p>Mr. Cheminais requested that officers continue to update Schools Forum on the impact of the shortfall on schools budgets to the end of the financial year. He asked whether it was possible to programme the PLASC system to prevent primary schools from making this mistake again.</p> <p>Stephen Read said that he would investigate this matter.</p> <p>Julie Taylor said that it was a huge task to predict the pupil population over a three year period and this caused problems for many Authorities. The DCSF was investigating this matter and a national funding review was currently taking place. The DCSF was examining whether it was practical to use October census data to calculate DGS from</p>	<p>Stephen Read</p>
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	<p>November onwards so that Authorities had their final DSG before the end of the financial year. Local Authorities submitted census data to the best of their ability but it was by no means a straight forward process.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the impact on schools of the shortfall in Walsall's DSG funding be included on future Schools Forum agendas.</p>	Dawn Morris
<p>5. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)</p> <p>There were no items to be considered in private session but Members noted that Schools Forum meetings were not public meetings in the legal sense but meetings to which the public were invited and thus the public could be excluded at any time.</p>	
<p>4. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Building Schools for the Future</p> <p>A presentation was made by Barry Fielding, the Interim Project Director of Building Schools for the Future.</p> <p>Mr. Fielding said that a permanent Projects Director would be appointed by February, 2009. He referred to the key players involved in Building Schools for the Future i.e. Local Authorities, schools, the DCSF, national programme partners and specialist private sector companies.</p> <p>Mr. Fielding said that BSF was a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform learning opportunities through the replacement and refurbishment of schools. Local Authorities were being introduced to the programme in waves and Walsall was part of Wave 6a. Authorities in Waves 4 to 6 were now involved in the selection process on Readiness to Delivery. He also referred to the Primary Capital Programme to renew primary school buildings and said that for Walsall, this would mean an overall £100 million capital expenditure programme for its primary schools over the next ten years.</p> <p>Mr. Fielding said that the BSF programme was all about transforming the way children and young people learn in Walsall and the way school buildings</p>	

	<p>were used in the local community. Walsall Council would be working in partnership with Serco and other Council services such as regeneration, libraries and housing to deliver the transformation programme. Other partnership agencies such as health, the voluntary sector and local businesses would also be involved to bring the whole community together. Approximately 80% of funding was in place under Wave 6a for the first six schools in Walsall to benefit from BSF and Local Authorities had been invited to express interest for inclusion in Wave 7.</p> <p>Mr. Fielding referred to the draft timetable for implementing the programme and said that at the end of the procurement process, a Local Education Authority partner would be appointed to deliver the transformation programme in Walsall. It was important to choose the right partner as they would be working closely with the Council for a long time. The construction phase was planned to commence from August, 2011.</p> <p>Mr. Fielding said that the Government had committed £2 - 3 billion per year for the BSF programme, shared across all participating Authorities, and there appeared to be cross-party agreement that notwithstanding any change of Government, the BSF programme would continue although, of course, this could not be guaranteed.</p> <p>The Chairman queried the position of Academies in the BSF programme. Mr. Fielding said there could be two further Academies created in Walsall. If the Council was successful in its application for Wave 7, the two new Academies and the funding associated with them would be completely separate from BSF.</p> <p>The Vice-Chairman was concerned that BSF was a PFI scheme over which schools and governing bodies would have no control.</p> <p>Mr. Flynn referred to his school's experience of PFI and said this had been an incredibly complex procedure but one which he considered had brought massive benefits to his school. With regard to BSF, Mr. Flynn said that he believed that the key was to ensure that the initial contract was right and to learn from any mistakes that were made with the PFI process.</p>	
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	<p>Ms. Lomas was concerned about the impact that creating additional Academies in Walsall would have on the DSG funding for other schools in Walsall.</p> <p>It was suggested that it would be helpful for Schools Forum to have a presentation at the next meeting on different governance and there was general support for this suggestion.</p> <p>Mrs. Letts referred to the BSF programme and said that the Teaching Unions would like to see consultation with the key people from the very beginning of the process. She commented that many primary schools occupied small sites and development of these would be very difficult. There was a shortage of land in Walsall so it was important for there to be consultation on where and when school building was planned to take place.</p> <p>In thanking Mr. Fielding for his presentation, it was AGREED that a copy of the presentation be e-mailed to Schools Forum Members.</p>	<p>Dawn Morris</p> <p>Lesley Jones</p>
<p>5. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Long Service Awards</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Paul Smith set out the background to the report. He said that the previous voucher scheme for employees with more than 20 years service had been discontinued in February, 2008. The initial costs for this had been met corporately with the intention that future costs would be met locally. He said that a new scheme giving awards valued at £125 had now been implemented through the payroll system. Unfortunately, there had been insufficient discussions with schools at its inception and those schools with long service employees had been unaware that the costs of the awards would appear against their budgets. These schools had now received re-imbursement of the amounts deducted from their budgets and no further awards would be made for school-based staff pending agreement on the way forward.</p> <p>Paul Smith said that the proposal set out in the report was for Schools Forum to agree that the long</p>	

	<p>service awards scheme be applied across all schools and that schools meet the costs of the awards already paid. This should result in estimated average costs of around £75 per year over the next five years from the delegated budgets of schools with eligible employees. Current records showed that fewer than 430 staff in schools would become eligible for long service awards in the next five years. He said that the Council would provide information to all schools with eligible employees if these proposals were agreed.</p> <p>Mrs. Poyser queried how the costs of the long service awards had been met corporately in the past.</p> <p>Paul Smith said that in September, 2005, funds had been set aside to make long service awards to employees who had achieved this over the previous three or four years. A contract had been taken out to purchase vouchers to give to these employees. The initial costs of this had been met corporately and when the contract came to an end, the corporate funding also ceased as no further funds were available. He said that in respect of the newly re-launched long service awards, service areas of the Council would be expected to meet the costs from their staffing budgets.</p> <p>The Vice-Chairman said that all staff, irrespective of whether they worked in schools or at the Council, were employed by Walsall Council and should, therefore, have the cost of any long service award met by their employer i.e. Walsall Council, through the Council's budget. There was general support for this view.</p> <p>Mr. Flynn said that it was important that the criteria for receiving long service awards should apply equally across all schools in Walsall. For example, a number of schools had previously been given grant maintained status and staff in these schools whose service record was interrupted by GMS should not lose out because of this.</p> <p>It was AGREED:-</p> <p>(1) That the proposal that the cost of the long service awards scheme be met from schools delegated budgets not be approved;</p>	<p>Lesley Jones / Paul Smith</p>
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	<p>(2) That the matter be referred to Cabinet and that Cabinet be informed that it is the view of Schools Forum that the cost of the long service awards scheme to staff employed in schools should be met by Walsall Council through the Council's budget and should apply to staff of all schools, including former grant maintained schools, voluntary controlled and foundation schools.</p>	
<p>6. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Amendment to allocation of Harnessing Technology Funds</p> <p>A report was submitted and the contents outlined by Stephen Read.</p> <p>It was AGREED:-</p> <p>(1) To approve the funding for harnessing technology ICT standards fund, as detailed in the report;</p> <p>(2) To note that it is currently anticipated that the grant in years 2 and 3 will be allocated to schools using the same basis as for 2008/09 and the centrally retained element will continue to be 25% plus additional for specific projects thus enabling a response to initiatives to be made as they develop.</p>	<p>Dawn Morris</p>
<p>7. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Indicative Budgets 2009 and 2010 - Update</p> <p>It was noted that this matter had already been considered under Matters Arising from the minutes of 16th September, 2008 meeting.</p>	
<p>8. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Early Years Funding Review</p> <p>(a) Progress report from Early Years Sub-Group</p> <p>(b) September 2009 target - options for flexible offer to 25% most deprived 3 and 4 year olds</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p>	

	<p>Dawn Morris outlined the background to the report and the recommendations of the Early Years Sub-Group.</p> <p>It was AGREED unanimously that Option B to target the offer, through a setting, as detailed in the report, be adopted.</p>	Dawn Morris
<p>9. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>A copy of the Forward Plan was submitted.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the following items be added to the Forward Plan for the next meeting:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Presentation on different governance</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Impact on schools of the shortfall in Walsall's DSG - Update</p>	<p>Dawn Morris</p> <p>Dawn Morris/Clerk to action</p>
<p>10. 11.11.08</p>	<p>Correspondence received</p> <p>The contents of a letter from the Department for Children, Schools and Families informing Schools Forum that there were no central funds available to assist in making up the shortfall in Walsall's DSG was noted.</p> <p>It was AGREED that a letter of thanks for his contribution to the work of Schools Forum be sent to the retiring Chairman, Nick Chomyk.</p>	Lesley Jones
	<p>Date and time of next meeting</p> <p>It was NOTED that the next meeting of Schools Forum would be held on Tuesday, 9th December, 2008 at 4.00 p.m. in Room TR1, Beechdale Lifelong Learning Centre, Stephenson Square, Beechdale, Walsall.</p>	

The meeting terminated at 7.45 p.m.